

# A CONSUMING FIRE

Sermon by Rev. C. B. Allen, Jr., on the Text, "Wickedness Burneth as a Fire."

Fanciful Ideas of the Ancients on the Origin of Fire and Apt Applications.

The Results of a Life of Sin Pictured in Strong Terms—Things Upon Which Evil Feeds.

The following sermon was delivered by Rev. C. B. Allen, Jr., pastor of the First Baptist church of this city, the text being the eighteenth verse of the ninth chapter of Isaiah: "Wickedness burneth as a fire."

The preacher said:

Wickedness burneth as the fire. Isa. IX: 18.

Is an infernal machine an instrument of terror? So is sin. Will one destroy terribly? So will the other and eternally. Sin is the most terrible thing in the universe. The most expressive types are used to teach men what it is.

It is likened to a flood which breaking through its confines sweeps over fields, vineyards, orchards, houses, destroys every trace of verdure, beauty and fruitfulness, and leaves behind widespread ruin and disease breeding desolation.

It is often likened to the leprosy, that infectious blood disease which begins within where no eye can see it, no human skill can detect it, eats its way outward and never looses its poisonous grasp until its victim is a living corpse, its anguish unutterable, its fate rotten into his grave.

Sin is of an insidious nature. It begins in the innermost recesses of the mind. It is scarcely discernible. It is like a poison that enters the fountain of thought, it taints desire, it debases love and paralyzes the will. Let it alone and it will run its course, blighten the bud of every fair hope, ruin every virtue, and in all its leprosy, its anguish unutterable, its fate rotten into his grave.

It is sometimes likened to fire—"for wickedness burneth as a fire." Its hot breath suffocates as fire heated air; its tongue blisters and burns as burns the tongue of fire; its embrace is as the embrace of sheeted flames—"for wickedness burneth as a fire."

Let us note some points of similarity between fire and sin:

1. Very much concerning both fire and sin is veiled in obscurity. You cannot weigh the flames to your balance. Not can you catch and weigh sin. One can form no sort of conception as to the destructive form of fire. The awful, absolute, eternal destruction wrought by sin passes far out beyond the range of human ken.

Just at what time the race of men discovered fire and its use is lost in obscurity. We meet with many legends respecting this matter, all of which are no doubt fanciful.

The inhabitants of some of the islands of the sea declare that the great god Mani descended into the fire, took the fire and there discovered the secret, and brought back fire. Another legend declares that Mani obtained fire from his grandmother, who drew it from her finger nail.

The Australians say that the good old man, undi, opened the door of the sun, and light streaming upon the earth it was discovered to be full of serpents. His daughter tried to slay the serpent, and from the splintered staff fire flashed.

A Persian legend declares that Hushink, a powerful hero, hurled a stone at a dragon. The stone missed the dragon, and was splintered upon a rock when "the light shone from the dark pebble, the heart of the rock flashed out in glory, and fire was seen for the first time in the world."

The Hindus think that fire came from the clatter of solar horses on the hard pavement of the sky. The Dakotas claim that their ancestors obtained fire from the sparks which a panther struck from its claws as it leaped away over the rocks. From these, the Greeks declare, stole fire from the gods and brought it to men in a hollow tube.

These legends are as fanciful, and after all it matters nothing how and when men discovered fire since there is such a thing as fire. At just what time in the history of our race sin came into the world is known not. Our first parents, we are told, lived many years in uninterrupted bliss before sin entered to blight forever their joy, and that of every son and daughter to the end of time. But its power to blight and destroy no one can comprehend until men can bottle all the scalding tears of grief which have run like rivers from human eyes, until none can fathom the abyss of folly, shame and ruin into which men have fallen and measure all the consequent remorse of conscience and anguish of soul; until men can endure the wrath of God against sin; until they can compute the cost of a soul's redemption as measured by the love, humiliation and suffering of Jesus of Nazareth; until men can fathom the mercy of an infinitely Holy Ghost; until then no man can form any just conception of the destructive form of sin. But whatever of obscurity may envelope it, sin is none the less a fact. No one doubts it. The evidences of its reality are many, heartrending and appalling. Do you doubt the existence of such a sin? Look then into the faces of men. Behold there care's deep plowed furrows. See grief's ineffaceable engravings. Scan the faces of hardened criminals, and behold the scars and the yet unhealed wounds of passion's convulsive war. And can you then doubt for so much as a moment the awful reality of sin? Doubt it? Then look into your own heart and behold the malicious passions which, like beasts of prey, must be chained, whipped, coaxed, mastered, or they will run riot over and waste the soul. Do you doubt it? Asylum for the insane and for orphaned homes of the friendless and reformatories for the vicious; schoolhouses and churches; these are not alone evidences of the good in man, but evidences as well of the terrible depravity in his heart. Do you doubt the existence of sin? Behold courthouses and jail, emphyseas, bickerings, jealousies, enmities, blighted hopes, bleeding hearts, domestic infelicities, grinning imbecility, deplorable insanity, the moan of the sick, the helplessness of infancy, the heartlessness of treachery, the remorse of conscience, the empty cradle, and the coffin dead—these are sin's handiwork. These tell of sin and pain and woe old as the hopes of man, and deep as his capacity to love and hope and suffer. Doubt it? Sin, sin, is an awful, heartrending, appalling reality, and it burneth like a fire.

2. Both fires and sin usually have but a small and feeble beginning. The legend of the origin of fire was, as we have just now noted, that of a broken staff or splintered rock, or the spark from the clatter of horses' feet. The great fires which have destroyed navies, devastated wide sweeps of fertile plain, laid waste towns and cities in ruins and rendered millions of people homeless and penniless began in the spark from a passing locomotive, in the smoldering ash heap, in the stump of a cast-off cigar. On the still air of an October Sabbath evening, just as the people came pouring out of the city churches, an alarm of fire smote the air. Little attention was paid it at the time save by the firemen and those in the immediate vicinity of the small blaze. The people of the great city went to their homes and to

their slumber. Once again a loud alarm rang out. A few were aroused, but the great city slept on. Yet once again and again alarms smote the air and startled the sleeping city. Few slept now, for the atmosphere had become laden with smoke, the sky all around crimson with ascending flames. All the night long the flames rolled on and when the dawn smote the eastern sky along the wires to Racine, Milwaukee, Madison, Elgin, Bloomington, St. Louis, Michigan City and Indianapolis flashed the news of the great city's imminent peril. Swift as steam could carry them flew engine and brave firemen from other cities to battle with the thoughtless and devouring flames. On, on, on, wave on wave, billow on billow, hissing like ten million vipers, roaring like the winds in the deep heart of the forest, like the coming of the day of doom swept that magnificent, matchless, dread-inspiring, doom-impendent sea of fire. Never before had eye looked upon a scene so like that which shall be when the world shall be wrapped in flames and the elements consumed with fervent heat. Before that fire's devouring tread went down the hovel of the poor and the palace of the rich. Consumed alike was the slith of the gutter and the fruit of the garden, the poor man's mite, the poor man's pittance, and the rich man's millions. Over all that once fair scene desolation laid her shroud, and from her black folds men heard the cry of the orphan—the wail of despair and looked on the face of death.

Chicago's great fire began in the gleam of a lamp's mellow light. So sin is a small beginning. Men do not become great sinners at a single bound. The man who now steals thousands began by petty pilferings. The prodigal's headlong tumble into abysmal folly and ruin began in a fret at parental restraint.

Mark you the riotous man. His cheeks are bloated and blotched; his eyes are fiery and lustful; his mind is filled with loathsome thoughts, desires and passions; his base deeds drag him down until he becomes at the last a very brute—a great, ugly, ulcerous monstrosity. He took his first glass of rum, swore his first oath, harbored his first vile thought and then the demons of the lost world on his track so great were the terrors of conscience.

The mania for drink and gambling breeds, perchance, at the social fireside, but the fire there kindled sweeps on, and cases until at last there is left but the charred remnants of manhood, and the blackened ruins of a soul—ruined for time and for eternity.

So all sinning has at first a feeble beginning. Man was created in the image of his Maker. He knew no sin. Then came the thought, that was the beginning. The thought came to Eve that perhaps God was deceiving them—then doubt, then the desire for the forbidden fruit; then the will to take it; then the actual taking it, then resultant fear of God, exile from the beautiful garden, remorse of conscience, and the murder of Abel, the flight and terror of Cain. In that spark—a thought—the fire began. And the flames thus started waxed fiercer and hotter, spread far and wide, until every imagination, every thought of men were set on fire, and wars and pestilences have blasted the earth, cursings, bitterness, enmity, deceit, cunning, treachery, perjury, murder, covetousness and greed swept over the whole earth and had it not been for the restraint of the Omnipotent God the whole world had become long before our time an arid waste—"For wickedness burneth as the fire."

Think you that such a sea of fire swept instant into existence? I tell you nay. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth." In the evil thought, the first lodgement in your mind, in the half formed evil purpose lie all the possibilities of a great fire that shall sweep beyond control over your whole being, blast every good in you and leave you a wretched slave in the present life and for the life to come.

3. But note again that both fire and sin once begun find ready at hand abundant fuel for the flames. In the walls of our sin we have the fuel, the fuel, the fuel in which you now sit, in the fine clothes you wear, in the food we eat, there is more or less of latent heat. These all are fuel for the flames. Sin is much in our lives which serves as fuel to the flames. You cannot set fire to the heart of granite. The flames will not kindle in iron, or feed on water. Men could never be tempted to wrong doing if there were nothing within the heart to which the temptation from without appeals. Men would never be burned out with sin if there were naught in them to feed the flames any more than you could burn a log if it were not for the combustible material in our hearts. You never realized how much of it there is in your heart until some sinful thought shot into flame in the midst of it. You never knew until a good experience taught you how great a fire one small glass of rum could kindle on your heart's freestone just where the false breezes of desire would fan the flames. Men say and they think that they are self-masterful, that one glass of rum, or a thousand for that matter, cannot be over their master. Ah, you may be master of the rum, but you are not master of the desires and appetites and passions which rum sets on fire? Many a poor man has discovered when it has become too late that he is no master and the fires have burned on until life has burned out. In this lies the danger that there is so much of fuel in our own hearts for the flames to feed upon. Remember this—that the fire of sin is kindled by the fuel in your heart. This putting the wine cup to the lips—this tempting your soul with ever so little of folly and vice what is it but as the dropping of sparks among the dry sticks and dry grass of sin? The fire once kindled will roll on and thoughts, desires, purposes, passions will be as so much fuel heaped upon the fire.

True it is that the fires may be very weak in your heart and mine, but let us never forget that there is much inflammable material in our hearts and many breezes from without to fan the spark within with flaming fire.

A spark from a passing locomotive sets the grass on fire, and the prairie is burned over. Why? Because there was so much fuel for the flames.

Remember the combustible material in your heart, and don't flash flints thereabouts. Let us learn one or two lessons.

1. Let us learn to fear and hate sin. The leprosy, that loathsome pestilence, whose beginning no eye can see, no sensitive nerve register, whose progress no human skill can stay, which brings at the last an unutterably awful death—this is sin. Sin is a fearful thing. It can only rot the body. How much more is sin to be feared, for it rots the soul! Do you dread the fire of a consuming fever? That lays waste the body. Sin terribly burns the soul. Suppose a man should knowingly, deliberately and purposely set fire to your house, and your children should perish in the flames? Or suppose that one should knowingly and purposely bring right into your family the germs of some dreaded pestilence. Would not you hate that fiend—hate him with all the intensity of your soul? Do you hate sin? That no man, riotous, deep-namable pestilence that smells to heaven, and sinks souls into hell? Do you hate that? Sin—that which kindles envy, jealousy, bickerings, backbiting, and the passions of the soul into sheeted, consuming flames.

Do you hate that? Sin—because of which disease laid its long, skinny fingers upon your beloved child and snatched him from your arms. Sin—because of which you have wept by the grave of life's sweetest hopes. Sin—because of which the grim, giant ghost of despair stalked into your heart and there remains. Sin—because of which so many Gethsemanes lie hard by your pathway through life. Sin—because of which that cemetery lies out there under the silent stars. Sin—because of which the soul sinks into abysmal woe. Sin—because which the wrath of God has gone forth as a devouring fire. Do you

hate and hate that? God pity the man whose soul does not flash fire when he thinks of sin. God pity the man who does not hate sin as he hates the demons of the bottomless pit. God pity the man who does not murmur and blaspheme the pang of eternal torment, and does not bring into play every faculty and form of his being to beat back the devouring flames.

2. Let us learn to take every precaution against sin. Sin cannot be played with. How wise we are about some matters, and yet how foolish and foolhardy about some others? We take precaution against disease. Let it be once thought that the dread scourge cholera or the yellow fever will break out in our midst, and the city is speedily cleansed from one end to the other. We take great care that fire may not break out. We make great provisions in case fire does break out that it may be quenched speedily. Our reservoirs and miles of pipes are full of water day and night the year round. Hydrants are located on every street corner. We employ firemen and furnish them abundant apparatus to fight the flames. What precautions we do take, and against what? A fire that can at most destroy our property and our bodies. Sin strikes the body and body. Would that men and women were thus wise in respect to dread sin which burneth as the fire. But men laugh at fears as they would not at fires, now for a long time, and burning still it is a mighty fire in your heart? Have you battled long with the flames, and still they sweep in? Do you realize your peril and shrink of yourself as but a brand in the midst of the burning? Then I tell you of one who can put out the flames and snatch you from the fires—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you will remember that a few years since a great fire broke out in Park Row, New York City. One of the great buildings in that crowded street was wrapped in flames.

At one of the windows in the topmost story appeared a girl wringing her hands in helpless despair. The flames seethed and hissed and roared, and billow on billow higher and higher, nearer still and nearer to the doomed. Every stairway leading upward was a sea of fire. Ladders were run up, but the longest ladders to the longest failed to reach the window where she stands appealing helplessly for rescue.

In the peril? Strong men wring their hands and cry like children. But see a stalwart fireman mounts that ladder, measures with swift glance the distance between the topmost rung and the window sill, sees that a man's length will span it, and then he leaps. Over his head his length standing there in that gap the imperiled girl goes into safety. Oh man; oh woman, is not the parable plain? Into the gap between you, imperiled by the fires of sin and life eternal, Jesus flung the wondrous length of his humanity and his divinity and through him by faith you may go into eternal safety. Will you come tonight?

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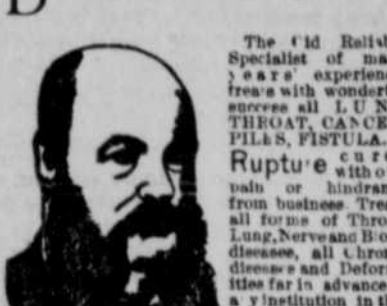
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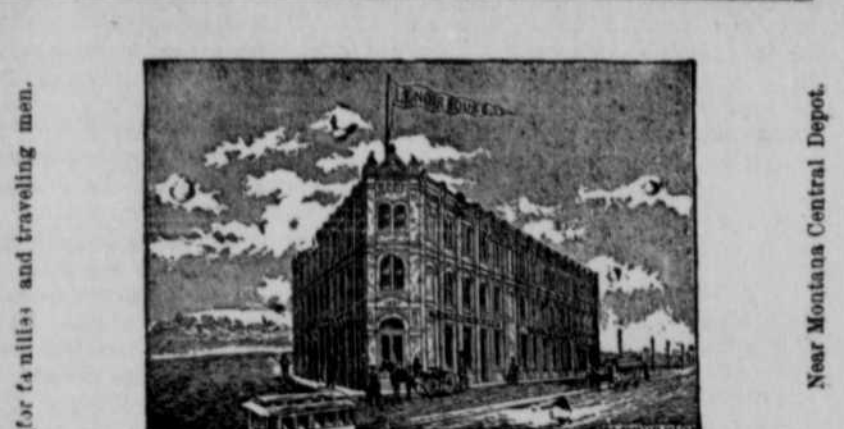
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(No. 221.) Application for a Patent.

UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE, Helena, Montana, Jan. 16, 1899.

Notice is hereby given that Timothy Wilcox, Harrison Ashby, Oliver C. Rinker, Ida B. Yorgy and William H. Hardwick, whose post office address is Helena, M. T., have this day filed their application for a patent for one hundred and fifty-seven acres of the six of section 35, in township 10, n. range 3, w. of principal base line and meridian of Montana territory, containing 320 acres. The location of this mine is recorded in the recorder's office of Lewis and Clarke county in book F of R and D. The adjoining claimants are unknown.

W. LANGHORNE, Register.

John W. Eddy, attorney for Applicants. First publication Jan. 17, 1899.

(No. 2216.) Application for a Patent.

UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE, Helena, Montana, Jan. 16, 1899.

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S. W. LANGHORNE, Register.

John W. Eddy, attorney for Applicants. First publication Jan. 16, 1899.

Notice to Co-Owners.

To Charles Whitcomb and H. E. Davis: You are hereby notified that I have expended one hundred dollars in labor and improvements upon the Lewis and Clarke quartz lode, situated in the Lewis and Clarke county, Montana Territory, in St. Paul (unorganized) mining district, and is bounded on the north by the Lewis and Clarke lode, on the east by the Comstock and Jerome lodes, in order to hold said premises under the provisions of section 2324, revised statutes of the United States, and if within ninety days after this notice you fail or refuse to contribute your proportion of such expenditure as a co-owner, your interest in said Lewis and Clarke lode claim will become the property of this claimant.

Marysville, Lewis and Clarke county, Jan. 15, 1899. FRANCIS BRYAN.

Notice to Co-Owners.

To Geo. Bowen: You are hereby notified that I have expended two hundred dollars in labor and improvements upon the Lewis and Clarke quartz lode, situated in the Lewis and Clarke county, Montana Territory, in St. Paul (unorganized) mining district, and is bounded on the north by the Lewis and Clarke lode, on the east by the Comstock and Jerome lodes, in order to hold said premises under the provisions of section 2324, revised statutes of the United States, and if within ninety days after this notice you fail or refuse to contribute your proportion of such expenditure as a co-owner, your interest in said Lewis and Clarke lode claim will become the property of this claimant.

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